

Here at last we are suddenly far from the
 Franklins and
 Benthams. We realise again that this rustic
 Worldly
 Wiseman is, all the same, a poet. Cobbett
 jeers at Shake-
 speare; Hesiod, though infinitely distant,
 remains his kin,
 Being so solitary, he is indeed little interested
 in drawing
 full-length characters, in creating other
 human beings-
 far less so not only than Shakespeare or
 Chaucer or
 Homer, but less than Langland with his
 Seven Deadly
 Sins. Hesiod's human figures, even Pandora,
 pass in a
 single flashing phrase and are gone. *His*
Wife of Bath
 roasts one husband for a lifetime; but she
 only takes one
 line to do it in. Where Langland spends a
 page on his
 Sloth, who like Falstaff at Gad's Hill, is also a
 robber,
 Hesiod merely says with terse innuendo 'get
 a dog lest
 some *sleeper by day* steal your goods'; and,
 elsewhere,
 with one of his most vivid laconisms:

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Slum the seat in the forge and the warmth
 where gossips gather
 In winter, when the cold keeps men from
 work.
 But the man that does not flinch can still
 find profit;
 Lest want should grip you in the darkened
 days,
 Nursing a swollen heel in your thin hand.

Never has poverty-stricken tramp been
 painted with
 more artistic economy than in those last five
 Greek words.

There stands misery, vivid, but not sordid.
Langland
would have given us several lines about his
rags and the
lice walking on them; Mr Joyce, several
paragraphs. But
this peasant, with no pretensions to 'nobility',
is free from
that morbid preoccupation with squalor
which plays on
the frayed nerves of modern intellectuals,
like a slum-cat
walking on the keys of a piano. Yet the
way to paint